

Tip of the



Prevention Information from CSAP's Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies

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PREVENTION FOR HIGH-RISK POPULATIONS: Children with Incarcerated Parent

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The association between substance use/abuse and criminal activity leading to incarceration is well established. As well as serving time for drug related charges, many inmates were intoxicated at the time their crimes were committed, and are themselves addicts. The need for substance abuse treatment for inmates is clear.

Most recent data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, estimate that 721,500 inmates are parents to 1.5 million children under the age of 18. It is no surprise that children with incarcerated parents may be at high risk for substance abuse and violence (Sack et al., 1976; Fritsch and Burkhead, 1981; Johnston, 1995b). Research points to risk factors that may effect these youth, but what can we do about it?

While there is a recognized lack of research-based programs specifically designed for, or evaluated with, this population of high-risk youth, there are approaches that promise to impact them. Among these are science-based, family-oriented interventions that address positive socialization of children, and risk factors in the family domain.

Adapting existing research-based, family-oriented interventions to meet this population may not be as insurmountable as it seems. By collaborating with agencies currently serving this population, it may be possible to apply current Best Practices appropriate for selective or indicated populations, and add components addressing specific needs of families with an incarcerated parent (for example, appropriate prison visitation and family support).

General principles to follow for working with Children with Incarcerated Parent:

Assess the Risk and Protective Factors for this target population.

Use research-based principles and programs that are designed to address prioritized Risk and Protective Factors. Consider using Best Practices in the family domain, and adapting to serve children with incarcerated parent.

Collaborate with existing prisoner-family support programs and faith-based programs already serving prisoners and family members.

With more emphasis on the development of effective prevention programs for this high-risk population, we may be able to finally begin breaking the cycle of dysfunctional families producing the same.

Innovative prevention providers may find opportunities through federal funding sources to answer the unmet need for effective science-based prevention serving children of inmates. For more information on family support activities for children of incarcerated parents:

U.S. Department of Justice
www.ojp.usdoj.gov

Child Welfare League of America
www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated

Family and Corrections Network
www.fcnetwork.org

The six regional CAPTs are funded by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention in the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. For more information on this Tip of the CAPT or other WestCAPT services, please visit our web site: www.westcapt.org or our best practices website: www.open.org/westcapt.

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